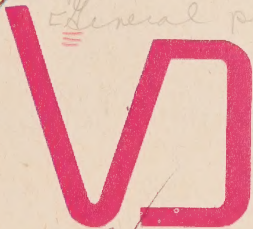


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What does V.D. stand for?

V.D. is the abbreviation for venereal disease. There are two main kinds in Canada. They are called syphilis and gonorrhea. Each is caused by germs that infect the body. The germs causing each disease are completely different and each type produces its own characteristic signs and symptoms.



Why worry about V.D.?

In spite of the fact that doctors can cure V.D. with penicillin and other drugs, there has been an increase in the number of people suffering from V.D., especially gonorrhea. For the most part, the increase is among young people. More than 50 per cent of the persons reported as gonorrhea cases in recent years are between 15

and 25 years of age. Another 18 per cent are 25 to 30.

Although V.D. causes severe or fatal complications in only a small proportion of cases, it does cause a great deal of illness which could be completely prevented. Therefore, it is important that everyone know the facts.

How do you get V.D.?

Venereal diseases are caught from infected persons. Both syphilis and gonorrhea are spread by sexual intercourse between persons of the opposite sex, and also between persons of the same sex.

V.D. germs soon die away from the warm moist protection of the body. Contrary to popular belief, they are *not* spread by contact with contaminated toilet seats and door-knobs, or by shaking hands, handling money, etc. Lifting and straining have nothing to do with getting these diseases.

The body does not build up an immunity to V.D. as it does to measles. A person can be infected over and over again, and one can have

both gonorrhea and syphilis at the same time. There are no vaccines against V.D. but scientists are investigating the possibilities.

Contraceptive devices are designed to prevent pregnancy, and no reliance can be placed on any of them as a means of preventing V.D. The only type which offers any protection at all is the condom, or safe, worn by the male. This might help prevent the man getting germs from an infected partner, and might also help prevent an infected man passing germs to a non-infected partner.



What are the signs and symptoms of syphilis?

The first stage of syphilis shows up as a sore which appears between 10 and 90 days after intercourse with an infected person. It appears



at the place where the germs entered the body, usually on or around the sexual organs. This sore is called a chancre and may be so small that it goes unnoticed, especially in women where it may be hidden internally. It is usually in the form of a small painless ulcer which is full of syphilis germs. Hence, the disease is

easily spread to other persons who come into intimate contact at this stage of infection. It lasts from several days to several weeks and then, even without treatment, disappears. Unfortunately, this does not mean that the trouble has ended. The germs are still increasing in number and spreading throughout the body by way of the blood stream.

The second stage usually appears three to six weeks later when the chancre may or may not have disappeared. Signs and symptoms at this stage often imitate those of many other diseases and consist of such things as generalized skin rash which often includes the palms of the hands and the soles of the feet; sore throat; fever; sores in the mouth; headache; bone pain and patchy loss of hair. During this stage, the disease is very easily spread by sexual intercourse, or by kissing if mouth sores happen to be present. Like the chancre of the first stage, these signs and symptoms will disappear in time, even without any treatment. For many years the disease may appear to have been cured spontaneously and this is called the hidden or latent stage. Although there are no visible effects, the germs may continue to attack the important organs of the body—brain, eyes, heart, liver, bones, kidneys. The *only* way to detect syphilis at this stage is by blood tests.

Finally, the third or last stage of syphilis will show up in about a third of untreated cases as a heart attack, paralysis, blindness, or mental illness. This may occur 20 years or more after the first stage of the infection.

The tragedy of syphilis strikes hardest in the home when babies are the innocent victims of parental infection. Congenital (to be born with) syphilis occurs when a pregnant mother suffering from the disease passes the germs to her unborn child. This can result in the baby being born dead or deformed. The best way to avoid such a tragedy is for every expectant mother to have a routine blood test as early as possible in pregnancy. Proper treatment, given in time, cures her of the infection and ensures the birth of a child free from syphilis.

If syphilis is suspected, a person should consult a qualified medical doctor at once. Only after a physical examination and necessary laboratory tests can a diagnosis of syphilis be made.

What are the signs and symptoms of gonorrhea?

Symptoms in men usually appear from two to five days after sexual intercourse with an infected partner. There will be pain and burning during urination. Later, a discharge of pus may appear from the penis. If untreated, the germs may spread to cause inflammation and abscesses in surrounding tissues. If the exposure has been rectal, there may be pain on passing stools which may show streaks of blood and pus.



Genital-mouth exposure may result in sore throat.

Women may have similar pain and discharge but many do not notice anything unusual. Consequently, they become silent carriers and can



continue to spread the disease for months, not realizing they are infected. In a small percentage, the infection will spread internally to the reproductive organs and cause serious complications.

Sterility may be the end result of infection in both men and women. Another complication which may occur in both sexes is arthritis. This condition can cause permanent crippling of the joints.

A pregnant woman suffering from gonorrhea can infect the eyes of her baby at the time of delivery. If untreated, the eyes become red, inflamed, and discharge pus. The condition can lead to permanent blindness.

Can V.D. be cured?

Both syphilis and gonorrhea can be cured. If you suspect that you have been infected, consult your doctor immediately. Free treatment clinics are also maintained in many cities throughout Canada. *Names and personal information remain strictly confidential.* To obtain information on the location and hours of operation of these clinics, telephone the local public health department in your area.

Treatment kills V.D. germs but permanent damage done to body tissues can never be repaired. Therefore treatment should be started as early as possible.

Self-treatment with pills, salves or ointment is useless and dangerous. Avoid unqualified persons who advertise themselves as treatment experts.

Can the spread of V.D. be stopped?

Individual treatment is important but every infected person has caught the disease from another infected person, and perhaps even passed it on to someone else. It is therefore vital that each infected person give the names of all sexual contacts to his or her doctor. Contacts may then be found and offered the benefit of examination and treatment if necessary. This is the only way to prevent the further spread of V.D.

How does a person react when asked for the names of his or her sexual contacts? Naturally one may feel strongly against revealing such personal information. However, a common sense decision can easily be made bearing in mind a few simple facts:

- V.D. can seriously affect health;
- the spread of V.D. cannot be stopped unless

all infected contacts are found and treated;

- *treatment and contact tracing are carried out in strictest confidence.*

Obviously, a V.D. patient will do his or her sexual contacts a favour by helping the doctor and health department find them and arrange for examination and treatment. Unless there is such cooperation, the incidence of V.D. will continue to increase in the years to come and will cause needless suffering for many thousands of people.



Notes

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